

**Testimony of Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington Teachers' Union, before the Education Committee of the DC Council – Hearing, January 29, 2016**

**On the Substitute Teacher Leave Clarification Amendment Act of 2015**

Chairman Grosso and Members of the DC Council, my name is Elizabeth Davis. I have been an active, career educator in DC public schools for 40 years before winning the election as president of the Washington Teachers' Union in 2013. As highly effective career educator who has taught at least seven schools in the most underserved communities in the District, I have come to know and respect the value of having access to highly qualified, dedicated substitute teachers.

In the DC public schools, substitutes must possess a bachelor's degree or a minimum of 60 semester hours of course work from an accredited college/university and a valid substitute license. They are paid \$74.20-\$80 per day for the following duties:

Following the prepared lesson plan outline for the course of study. Instructs students through lectures, demonstrations and/or audiovisual aids. They assign lessons left by teachers when they are on sick or emergency leave, and in some cases develops lessons for teachers who may be on extended medical or family leave. They correct papers, participates in oral presentations by students, maintains attendance records and discipline in the classroom, cafeteria and on the playground in elementary schools.

Substitutes are responsible for the maintenance of classrooms, technology, learning materials and all property assigned to students in classrooms and labs. In short, they perform a vital function in the maintenance and continuity of daily education. In DCPS, substitutes are the educational bridges when regular classroom educators are absent. They are called early in the morning, take over lessons with short notice, and ensure that quality education is maintained in our classrooms. They are highly educated professional career educators who ensures that the quality of teaching and learning is not interrupted when regular classroom teachers are absent. Yet they are constantly seeking to be recognized as the professionals they are. Yet, throughout the US, and specifically in this school District, substitute teachers continue to advocate for professional compensation and development; they continue to seek support through collective bargaining and partnership with their full-time colleagues in the classroom.

The permanent version of the Substitute Teacher Leave Clarification Amendment Act of 2015 will take away sick days from nearly all substitute teachers. If this bill passes as introduced, substitute teachers will only be able to start accruing sick days after they have worked 30 consecutive days and potentially would lose those sick days as soon as their consecutive streak went below 30. There are more than 900 substitute teachers in DC. The denial of sick leave to these teachers correlates a significant health risk to children, teachers, parents and other school workers.

Our members and parents of the students they serve throughout the District applaud the efforts of Councilmembers Silverman, Nadeau, Allen, Orange, and May to protect substitute teachers. These members obviously understood the urgency of striking this language from the budget bill in September even though efforts to strike it fell two votes short. However, since that time, there has been significant mobilization from advocates throughout the District about the harm that taking away sick days from substitute teachers would do.

There are both practical and moral reasons to develop a sound substitute teacher programs in our school district. Liability is one practical concern for schools, administrators, and substitute's themselves. Case law holds the substitute, principal, and school district to the same standard of care as it does regular teachers, and each is liable for acts of negligence. As stewards of children in their care, teachers, administrators, and districts have a moral obligation, as well as a statutory and contractual one, to ensure that the best interests of student's guide policy and practice. Thus, it is only fitting that the current movement to elevate standards of practice in schools apply to substitute teachers, which have traditionally become a neglected sector of the education community. Our children, parents and teachers rely on the support of policy makers who respect workers' rights, no matter what work they choose to do. The decisions and laws you enact as policy makers are lessons to them about the value and degree of respect you hold for those individuals who work closest to our children on a daily basis. They expect the deeds of our elected officials to be consistent with their words. There is no need to further dehumanize the teaching profession by denying sick leave to substitute teachers. I hope you agree. Thank you for this time to speak. I am open to any questions you may have.